

Committee on Resources

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STATEMENT OF JON JARVIS, REGIONAL DIRECTOR, PACIFIC WEST REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, RECREATION, AND PUBLIC LANDS, OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 2457, TO AUTHORIZE FUNDS FOR AN EDUCATIONAL CENTER FOR THE CASTILLO DE SAN MARCOS NATIONAL MONUMENT, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

JULY 22, 2003

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department's views on H.R. 2457. This bill would authorize funds for an educational center for the Castillo de San Marcos National Monument.

The Department supports the concept of a cooperatively constructed and operated educational center for the Castillo de San Marcos National Monument (Monument) and the City of St. Augustine, Florida as outlined in H.R. 2457. However, because the National Park Service (NPS) is in the process of completing a General Management Plan (GMP) which will include an examination of the long-identified need for a Visitor Center at the Monument, we believe this legislation is premature and that the GMP process should be finalized before moving such a proposal. Additionally, in order to help us make further progress on the President's Initiative to eliminate the deferred maintenance backlog, we recommend that the subcommittee defer action on H.R. 2457 during the 108th Congress.

H.R. 2457 authorizes the Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) to award grants to the City of St. Augustine and the Colonial St. Augustine Preservation Foundation (Foundation) for land acquisition, planning, design, and construction of an educational center for the Monument and attractions located within the City. The grants will not be awarded until the City and Foundation have secured contributions for a dollar-for-dollar match of the grant. Prior to awarding a grant authorized under this bill, the Secretary is directed to enter into a cooperative agreement with the City and Foundation for the planning, design, construction, operation and maintenance of the educational center. This agreement will allow all the parties to determine – before the new facility is built – what are the full life-cycle costs to operate and maintain the center, and how these costs will be shared.

The federal portion of the grants proposed by H.R. 2457 would be \$2 million for land acquisition, design, and planning, and an additional \$2 million for construction. The Foundation has developed a conceptual design, as well as preliminary cost estimates for the educational center, which would be approximately 9,000 square feet in size and cost approximately \$3 million. If constructed, NPS operational costs are expected to be minimal as one of the primary purposes of the educational center would be to provide a sales outlet for joint tickets to the Monument and City attractions. These ticket sales are expected to generate enough additional revenue to cover all operational costs of the educational center. If revenues from ticket sales do not cover all operational and maintenance costs, then the cooperative agreement will specify how the unfunded costs will be shared among NPS, the City, and the Foundation.

The Castillo de San Marcos National Monument was originally proclaimed as Fort Marion National Monument, under the jurisdiction of the War Department, in 1924. The Monument was transferred to NPS in 1933 and renamed in 1942 and is located in St. Augustine, Florida, the oldest continuously occupied European settlement in the Continental United States. The Spanish, who controlled Florida for 225 years before it became a United States territory, constructed the Castillo de San Marcos, the oldest masonry fort in the Continental United States.

The Monument has never had a visitor center and has relied upon exhibits within the fort to provide visitor orientation and information even though it receives approximately 700,000 visitors each year. The need for a jointly developed and operated visitor center for the Monument and other local attractions was identified in the Monument's 1977 Draft Master Plan. Currently, the Monument is developing a General Management Plan to replace this almost 30-year-old management document and initial scoping for the plan has also identified the need for this type of visitor center. In a public forum and process, the General Management

Plan will seek to confirm the purpose, function, and scope of the proposed visitor center. Both of these plans encourage better cooperation between the NPS and the agency that interprets the civilian life of the Spanish soldier within the local community.

The educational center proposed in H.R. 2457 would serve the Monument, where the military story of the Spanish soldier's life is interpreted as well as the Colonial Spanish Quarter Museum operated by the City, where the civilian life of the soldier is interpreted. The City has operated the Spanish Quarter Museum since 1997 after being operated by the State of Florida since the mid 1960s.

The overall project would consist of two phases with the first phase consisting of land acquisition and facility planning and design and the second phase being facility construction. The bill also could allow the value of the land to be used as part of an in-kind match for the City and Foundation's match of the federal grant, if the land is donated to the Secretary. Although our understanding is that the intent is for the educational center to remain on City property and be City owned, should this donation occur, legislation would be required to expand the Monument's boundary around the proposed site of the educational center, which is adjacent to, but outside of, the current boundary.

That completes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions that you or any members of the subcommittee may have.